

FastForwardGeorgia

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GTA planning for VoIP in state government

GTA is developing a carefully planned approach for implementing Voice over IP (VoIP) in Georgia state government.

We are assessing the potential for VoIP to

- constrain increases in telecom costs
- improve the productivity of state employees
- enhance service delivery to constituents.

The size of the telephone network supported by GTA – more than 226,000 lines statewide – makes a clear and comprehensive implementation strategy essential.

We began our formal efforts in February 2005 with assistance from The Burton Group, a leading expert in VoIP. A report given to GTA by Burton in July 2005 recommended a carefully planned migration to a hybrid IP-PBX environment to

- minimize capital, operational and maintenance costs
- allow agencies to retain their existing voice and data networks and to migrate to a converged network when they need and can afford it
- enable agencies to use analog, digital or IP telephones
- allow services to be managed from a central location to further reduce costs.

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GTA focusing on strategies to make IT systems more efficient

GTA has begun an important new project to develop strategies for modernizing and improving the efficiency of state IT systems. The IT Efficiency and Modernization Project will examine the management of e-mail, servers and personal computers in state agencies.

The three areas addressed by the project are among the IT initiatives recommended by Governor Perdue's Commission for a New Georgia.

- **Improving the cost-effectiveness of e-mail services** – The state's Unified E-mail Address Book will give state employees the information they need to communicate quickly and easily with other state employees regardless of agency or e-mail system. It will lay the foundation for a statewide e-mail system to reduce hardware, software and maintenance costs.

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Georgia Technology Authority

Bringing the benefits of technology to Georgia government

MPLS upgrades make it possible for agencies to work more efficiently

More than 800 circuits at state agencies throughout Georgia now connect to the state's new wide area network, which is based on multi-protocol label switching (MPLS). About 2,400 circuits will connect to the upgraded WAN when the project is completed in spring 2006.

400 percent increase in bandwidth at no additional cost

The **Department of Corrections** recently complimented Kim Ruple, GTA's regional operations director, on the planning and execution of its network connections upgrade. Corrections' Information Technology Director **Terry Wolf** said the additional bandwidth at more than 200 field sites had greatly improved the performance of essential applications.

Under the previous network configuration, many field sites had minimal bandwidth. This led to slower loading times for the agency's Web-based Intranet and SCRIBE application suite and the occasional failure of e-mail attachments to reach their intended recipients.

The pricing for MPLS services enabled Corrections to provide its remote sites with at least a 400 percent increase in bandwidth – with most sites seeing even greater increases – at no additional overall cost to the agency.

“As Corrections continues its migration to a thin client environment, the additional bandwidth will readily accommodate the resulting increased traffic across the network,” Mr. Wolf said. “The increase in bandwidth will enable us to pursue other technology solutions, such as e-learning, Web-casting, teleconferencing and interoperability initiatives.”

Aggressive timeline met for DHR/OCP upgrade

Upgraded circuit connections to the MPLS network were completed in less than six weeks this past summer at 157 locations for DFCS' Office of Child Protection. The upgraded circuits make it possible to access critical applications and send and receive e-mails faster.

“The expertise, dedication, drive and coordination displayed by DHR, GTA and BellSouth were key in meeting an aggressive timeline,” said Tammy Cole, DHR's MPLS project manager. “All should be commended for their strong support and consideration of the customers at each of these sites during the MPLS conversion process. Job well done!”

Through competitive bidding, GTA contracted with BellSouth in 2004 to upgrade and manage the state's WAN. The new MPLS-based network offers many advantages over the state's previous network, including

- greater redundancy, speed, reliability and security
- more competitive pricing
- support for new services like Voice over IP
- support for quality of service to set priorities for transmissions and prevent loss of data or transmission delays. ■

Strategies to make IT systems more efficient

(from page 1)

- **Sharing hardware and software** – Agencies can improve their business operations and potentially reduce IT costs by sharing servers and software. Examples include computers and software for managing e-mail, operating Web sites, running databases and storing files. Several agencies are using VeriMove software to verify and update addresses before sending mail.
- **Lowering the cost of personal computers** – The project will determine whether agencies can simplify IT operations and reduce costs by giving their employees less powerful PCs connected to a central server. Information would be stored and most of the processing would take place on the central server. This approach to computing may reduce the need for IT support staff.

Agencies will take part in making decisions about ways to operate more efficiently and obtain greater value for IT expenditures. Much of the initial work will involve gathering information from agencies through online surveys and site visits. Information previously gathered from agencies will also be used in deciding on options.

GTA hosted a project kick-off meeting for state chief information officers and IT directors on August 8, 2005. Strategies and a recommended course of action will be issued in fall 2005. ■

Important considerations lead planning for VoIP

Here are some of the larger questions we're taking into consideration as we plan for VoIP in state government.

How can VoIP improve productivity and customer service?

Simply replacing an existing telephone system with VoIP fails to take full advantage of an opportunity to improve employee productivity and services to constituents. The greater potential for VoIP lies in its ability to integrate voice services with applications, such as

- interactive voice response (IVR) for constituents, including automatically detecting whether a caller speaks English or another language

- interacting with a constituent by taking control of his or her Web browser to demonstrate an online service, known as collaborative browsing
- text-to-speech capability for retrieving e-mail by phone
- enhanced video-conferencing in which multiple participants can write on a display screen and speak with each other at the same time, known as whiteboarding.

How secure is VoIP?

Since VoIP relies on an Internet Protocol infrastructure, handsets, cell phones and wireless devices must be protected from viruses and related security threats.

What are the visible and hidden costs associated with VoIP?

Agencies must make sure their local area network (LAN) can support VoIP. Upgrading and replacing existing cabling and electronics can be expensive. It may also require upgrading the skills of network support staff.

How reliable is VoIP?

Providing voice services over an agency's LAN greatly increases the amount of traffic on the LAN, and guarding against outages can become more difficult. If an agency's LAN goes down, both computing and voice services are unavailable. Additional redundancies may be needed to make an agency LAN more reliable. ■

GTA planning for VoIP (from page 1)

The report recommended against a "fork-lift" upgrade to VoIP. Such an approach would be costly, requiring the replacement of existing telephone systems and the upgrading of agency local area networks (LANs).

Burton report calls for phasing in VoIP

The report recommended implementing VoIP in phases

- when an agency builds a new facility
- when an agency location decides to use a non-PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) voice solution and the existing telecom equipment is nearing the end of its life cycle
- when an agency has a critical need for increased mobility and to support teleworkers.

For traditional Centrex users with basic feature and function requirements, migration would be triggered by the potential for the agency to reduce monthly recurring costs and when LAN upgrades are also needed for other projects.

The report recommended that VoIP services be managed and operated by a third-party vendor with equipment owned by the state.

Meanwhile, GTA will continue to prepare for VoIP migration by

- using VoIP-compliant wiring in newly constructed and renovated space
- adding IP phones to the state's contracts for telecom equipment.

GTA is continuing to upgrade the state's wide area network to multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) technology to provide greater bandwidth and reliability. MPLS supports new technologies like VoIP, which requires

quality of service (QoS) to avoid audio breakups and popping or clicking sounds. QoS enables network administrators to give specific transmissions, such as voice, priority over other transmissions.

GTA will develop equipment standards to support VoIP in state agencies, including standards for LANs, wiring, switches and access points for wireless devices. They will most likely be based on open standards to avoid dependence on a single vendor's technology.

We'll also work with agencies that are ready to move forward with VoIP to identify opportunities for them to gain experience with the technology. ■

Solutions Marketing brings GTA and customers together

Within GTA, the Office of Solutions Marketing is known as one of our most jovial groups. Sit down with them and learn a lot about technology and what GTA can do for state government.

"Our role is to represent GTA to our customers and our customers to GTA," says office director Tim Phillips. "We promote mutual communication and understanding so that GTA can effectively meet customer IT needs and ensure their satisfaction."

The team includes Tim, unit directors Lucy Bigham and Jody Chambers, three marketing support coordinators – Gina Tiedemann, Judy Garmany-Ylla and Marcia Partin – and nine account managers – Dana Weigen, Keith Hughes, Phyllis Lloyd, Arrie Porter, Shannon Thompson, David Brannen, Wayne Hill, John McCulland and Mary Simpkins. Each agency doing business with GTA is assigned an account manager to serve as a primary point of contact and advisor. Several account managers previously worked for the agencies they now serve or other state agencies.

The Solutions Marketing team is well versed in all of GTA's "hot" items (and acronyms) of today and tomorrow – from the MPLS upgrade of the state's wide area network and the data center relocation to new videoconferencing technologies, desktop security services, Voice

over IP and more.

They're also champions for the Team Georgia Connection intranet, sponsored by the Governor and available to all state employees at <http://team.georgia.gov>. Solutions Marketing's own Gina Tiedemann led the design and development of this site, which offers an employee directory, online forms, links of interest and other resources – even a "Daily Dilbert"! And starting next year, state employees can visit Team Georgia to access their pay, personal and leave information through PeopleSoft Self Service.

Taking care to listen and understand

A fundamental part of each team member's role, says Tim, is to listen. "We take care to listen to agencies and understand their needs first, so that we can bring them the right solutions, explained in terms they can understand. We share what we learn from our customers with other GTA teams to see how our products and services can be continually refined or enhanced to meet evolving needs."

For example, the team has played an important part in the development and implementation of the MPLS upgrade. Account managers facilitated 10 implementation teams, made sure agencies received important project information and incorporated agency feedback into project plans. Solutions Marketing also leads the MPLS Customer Contact Team, which works with agencies to design their networks, explain service

and pricing options, and prepare orders for new services.

"The team began these communications during the MPLS pilots, and they continue to keep agencies informed and involved in the rollout of this new technology," says Tim.

They used a similar approach to help agencies understand how they could best use enterprise IT contracts.

Solutions Marketing also assisted in the development of questionnaires that were used to gather essential information from state agencies for several major projects, including the MPLS upgrade, data center relocation and Unified E-mail Address Book.

Says Tim, "We work to balance GTA's outreach efforts with respect for our customers' time and true need so that we're not asking for information that GTA already has or doesn't really need."

Echoing the sentiments of the entire team, Tim adds, "The neat thing about our industry is that technology is getting better, faster and cheaper all the time. Part of our role – and everyone's role at GTA – is to keep up with the trends and issues, to know what will really add value and what's just a passing fad. The answers may be different for each agency." ■

To find out which GTA Solutions Marketing representative is assigned to your agency, visit www.gta.georgia.gov; click "Doing Business with GTA" and then "How Do I Find My GTA Account Manager?"

New service to verify address changes, save money

A line from an old song goes, "Doesn't anybody stay in one place anymore?"

It certainly seems that Georgians move around plenty. When the state sends correspondence to an outdated address, it's inefficient. Citizens don't receive mail from the state in a timely manner, and caseworkers and other state employees who visit constituents' homes waste time going to wrong addresses.

And it's expensive. The state's annual mailing costs top \$26 million, and it costs more than a dollar every time a piece of mail goes to an incorrect address. Wasted postage, re-mailing costs and charges from the United States Postal Service (USPS) to get the new address add up quickly.

A new change-of-address service offered by GTA uses a software application to automate constituents' address changes. The software, called VeriMove, uses the USPS national change-of-address file to update addresses. The new service is the result of a pilot project conducted by the Governance Council and GTA several months ago.

"This project came about as we began developing the state's IT blueprint," said Cigdem Delano, GTA's deputy executive director and a member of the Governance Council. "We were looking for ways to achieve cost savings from sharing services and avoiding unnecessary duplication." The Governance Council is composed of senior executives of 10 state agencies.

How the software works

The **Office of the Secretary of State** used VeriMove to update its voter registration file before sending out new voter registration cards in 2004. The update found that voters at more than 300,000 addresses had moved. The update saved approximately \$300,000 – roughly a dollar for each corrected address. The Office of the Secretary of State will soon be the first to use the service through GTA.

More agencies to begin soon

The departments of **Revenue, Natural Resources and Community Health** plan to begin using the change-of-address service early this fall. GTA account managers are ready to assist other agencies who want to use the service.

Todd Kelly, a manager in the Department of Revenue's taxpayer services division, is looking forward to getting started. "We're excited about the potential gains and efficiencies we can achieve," he said.

Cigdem is looking even farther ahead. "As more agencies participate, we could see annual savings of more than \$500,000," she said. "And enterprise use makes the cost far lower than an individual agency would have to pay on its own. Most agencies will pay only \$2,400 per year for the service."

Added incentive

The timing of the project makes it even more attractive. The USPS has filed a rate case with the Postal Rate Commission that would require mandatory use of the national change-of-address information by the mailer to retain postal discounts. If the rate case is approved, all state agencies will need to use the change-of-address service or a service bureau providing the same service to avoid losing postal discounts. The decision could come next year.

"This project follows the direction set by the Governor's Commission for a New Georgia, and it illustrates what the IT blueprint is all about – finding efficient ways for IT to support the state's business," Cigdem said.

For more information, please contact your GTA account manager. ■

10 essential cyber security tips

Here are 10 tips to protect yourself at work and at home.

1. Use anti-virus software and keep it up to date.
2. Don't open e-mails or attachments from unknown sources.
3. Protect your computer from Internet intruders – use firewalls.
4. Regularly download security updates and patches for operating systems and other software.
5. Use hard-to-guess passwords. Mix upper case, lower case, numbers or other characters not easily found in a dictionary, and make sure they are at least eight characters long.
6. Back up your computer data on disks or CD's regularly.
7. Don't share access to your computers with strangers.
8. Disconnect from the Internet when not in use.
9. Check your security on a regular basis.
10. Make sure your employees and/or family members know what to do if their computer becomes infected. ■

2005 Government Technology Conference offers training, seminars, special keynotes

Make plans now to register and attend the 2005 Government Technology Conference November 15-17 at the Omni CNN Center in Atlanta.

The conference training classes and seminars offer continuing education and career development at unusually low cost in comparison to many other events. As members of the conference advisory board, representatives from state and local government agencies in Georgia helped to plan the agenda to make sure it meets the special needs of public-sector technology managers as well as non-technology program executives.

The conference also includes exhibits from leading technology companies with products and services for government agencies.

The accomplishments of government agencies will be recognized with the Best of Georgia Awards, which honor innovation in IT and service delivery.

Seminars linked to Governor's goals

Concurrent seminars are organized in tracks, one of which focuses specifically on topics related to Governor Perdue's goals for a growing, educated, healthy and safe Georgia.

This year's keynote speakers are

- **Lonice Barrett**, who plays a major role in achieving Governor Perdue's goals as director of the Governor's Office of Implementation, and
- **Gopal Kapur**, Founder and President, Center for Project Management.

Both keynote addresses are open to the public without charge.

One and two-day training classes

Special one- and two-day classes take place November 14 and 15, and each class is rated on a scale of one, for "not technical"; two, for "slightly technical"; or three, for "moderately technical."

Topics include

- Programming with .NET (rated "moderately technical," two days at Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta)
- Programming with J2EE (rated "moderately technical," two days at Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta)

- Business Intelligence Through Project Intelligence (rated "not technical," one day)
- How to Manage a Breach (rated "moderately technical," one day)
- Government Transformation in a Changing Work Environment (rated "slightly technical," one day)
- Effective RFP Development (rated "slightly technical," one day).

Complete conference details – including registration information, pricing, and descriptions of courses and seminars – are online at <http://www.govtech.net/gtc/index.php/GTCSoutheast2005>. ■

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